



Iowa Outdoors

Iowa Department of Natural Resources
www.iowadnr.com

www.iowanaturestore.com

Editor: Mick Klemesrud, 515/281-8653
mick.klemesrud@dnr.state.ia.us

March 15, 2005

1. DNR Officers Nab Davis County Deer Poacher [electronic photo available]
2. DNR to Release More Trout in Banner Lakes
3. A Spring Blizzard of Migrating Snow Geese Invade Southern Iowa – by Lowell Washburn [electronic photos available]
4. Getting Back to Our Roots: Iowa Spring Prairie Rescue 2005
5. Snow Goose Spring Season – by Joe Wilkinson [Hold this story until March 17]
6. Boat Registrations Due by April 30
7. Songbird Feast

[Electronic photo available]

DNR OFFICERS NAB DAVIS COUNTY DEER POACHER

BLOOMFIELD – Bradley Cornelison, 30, of rural Davis County, pleaded guilty to six counts of killing a white tailed deer with a rifle, four counts of having no valid deer license, two counts of failure to tag a deer and one count of having no valid hunting license. Cornelison forfeited his hunting equipment, the illegal deer, will lose his hunting privileges for numerous years and must pay \$23,060 in fines and restitution.

Iowa Department of Natural Resources conservation officer Bob Stuchel said he was finding a lot of headless deer in Davis County during the fall of 2004. “I had a call from some agents with the Drug Task Force that found a number of deer heads when they did a consent search of the Cornelison residence,” Stuchel said. “We looked at their pictures, secured a search warrant and found more evidence of the illegal activity.”

Stuchel said they seized 13 white tailed deer heads with antlers from the residence and are continuing the investigation.

###

DNR TO RELEASE MORE TROUT IN BANNER LAKES

DES MOINES –The Iowa Department of Natural Resources is planning one more trout stocking at Banner Lakes at Summerset State Park, north of Indianola.

The DNR will stock an estimated 1,000 catchable sized trout around noon on March 25, in the 59-acre lake. “If we can get the weather to cooperate, we would like to use a boat to release the fish throughout the lake instead of just at the boat ramp,” said Dick McWilliams, fisheries biologist for the DNR.

Banner Lakes at Summerset State Park is the only central Iowa trout fishery. The trout are from the Big Springs hatchery near Elkader. Anglers who want to fish for the trout are required to purchase the trout privilege for \$11 in addition to an Iowa fishing license. The daily bag limit for trout is five and the possession limit is 10.

###

[Electronic photos available]

A SPRING BLIZZARD OF MIGRATING SNOW GEESE INVADE SOUTHERN IOWA

By Lowell Washburn

Iowa Department of Natural Resources

CORNING--A mid-March, spring blizzard is currently arriving in southwest Iowa. It's not your usual kind of snowstorm, however. This one doesn't consist of snowflakes but rather of snow geese.

Hundreds of thousands of lesser snow geese are currently pushing their way northward toward the remote, arctic breeding grounds of their ancestors. A spring spectacular of the highest order, the spring snow goose migration is hailed by scientists as one of the greatest wildlife assemblages on earth. It is a sight and sound that cannot be fully appreciated until witnessed firsthand.

Some of the most impressive concentrations occur along the broad floodplains of the Missouri River corridor in extreme western Iowa. Here snow goose numbers often reach or exceed one million birds. But along with those numbers, come problems. As contemporary populations of snow geese have continued to soar, the damage to fragile arctic nesting habitats has become dramatic and intolerable.

"Total snow goose numbers have more than tripled during the past 30 years," says DNR waterfowl biologist, Guy Zenner.

"Today, we've come to a point where we're literally seeing arctic nesting snow geese eat themselves out of house and home," Zenner said.

Scientists note that a full third of the vast arctic tundra is already destroyed, and that another third has been severely impacted by foraging snow geese. Were the damage stop immediately it could take a full century, perhaps more, for fragile plant life to recover. In addition to snow geese, the devastation is having a negative impact on nesting ducks, shorebirds, and other migratory nesters.

In an effort to reduce the numbers of light geese, a special spring [conservation order] hunt was initiated in 1999. The goal of the emergency act was to reduce the snow goose flock [estimated at more than 6 million birds] by 50 percent. With the seventh year of special goose hunts currently underway, biologists are encouraged as the measure shows preliminary signs of success.

"For the first time since records were kept, we are seeing the combined [regular and conservation order] harvest of snow geese reach or exceed one million birds," said Zenner.

"In Iowa, success has fluctuated with weather conditions. During the past five seasons we have harvested anywhere from around 12,000 to over 32,000 geese during the special [conservation order] seasons.

"I think it is important to note that our combined annual snow goose harvest now represents about four times the average that occurred from 1988 to 1997. To me, the figures are extremely encouraging and suggest that, given the appropriate time and tools, hunters may just be able to bring this population under control."

Depending on spring weather patterns, biologists predict that good numbers of snow geese, including an increasing number of juveniles, should continue to migrate through the state for the next two weeks. This year's snow goose hunt continues through April 15.

###

GETTING BACK TO OUR ROOTS: IOWA SPRING PRAIRIE RESCUE 2005

DES MOINES - Iowa volunteers are encouraged to get back to their roots in the 6th annual statewide Prairie Rescue event. Prairie workdays will be held at approximately 25 sites across the state. Volunteers can take part in numerous prairie management activities including: removal of non-native species and encroaching trees and shrubs, planting of native wildflowers and grasses, and monitoring prescribed burns. These workdays will take place on most weekends during March, April, and May.

Prairie is an important part of Iowa's natural and cultural heritage. At the time of Lewis and Clark expedition, 27 million acres of prairie covered Iowa's landscape. Seas

of rolling grass were the first sight of Iowa glimpsed by settlers, who saw the opportunities the Iowa landscape afforded and chose to sink their own roots here. Unfortunately, only 0.1%, or approximately 30,000 acres, of the original prairies experienced by Native Americans and early settlers remain intact today.

Prairie remnants are scattered throughout the state in small patches, most of which are surrounded by encroaching invasive plants. The pre-settlement prairie ecosystem was renewed by natural grazing and periodic fires that swept over the landscape. These fires have been suppressed over the past 150 years. Without proper management, which includes prescribed burns and removal of invasive non-prairie species, Iowa's remaining prairie remnants could be lost forever.

This year's prairie rescue is a chance for Iowans to literally get back to their roots and experience the living history of Iowa's prairies while preserving this legacy for future generations. Individuals, families and organizations are all invited to participate. Most sites are looking for volunteers to clear invading brush and trees from Iowa's prairie remnants, and some offer prairie planting. A few events include managed prairie burns (weather permitting) that the public can watch. No matter which event you attend, on-site experts will provide guidance and prairie education. All that is needed now is your participation.

Get your hands dirty for a good cause. Several private and public conservation groups are sponsoring sites this spring including the Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation, Iowa Department of Natural Resources, Keepers of the Land/AmeriCorps, Loess Hills Preservation Society, Iowa Prairie Network and the Grinnell College Center for Prairie Studies.

A few sites already selected include Brushy Creek State Recreation Area, on April 2, Waubonsie State Park, on April 9, Hayden Prairie State Preserve, on April 16, Breen Prairie Farm, on April 23, Union Slough National Wildlife Refuge and Nine Eagles State Park, both on April 30, Mines of Spain Recreation Area, on May 7, and Harrier Marsh, on May 14.

Events take place in the mornings and afternoons, and volunteer activities vary from site to site. In general, volunteers should dress for the weather (pants and long-sleeved shirts are recommended) and consider bringing a hat, sunscreen and water. For more information about Prairie Rescue and specific sites around the state, visit the web at: www.inhf.org/prairierescue2005.html. Additional questions can be directed to Katie Kemp at (515) 281-3134 or Katie.Kemp@dnr.stat.ia.us.

###

[Hold this story until March 17]

SNOW GOOSE SPRING SEASON

By Joe Wilkinson

Iowa Department of Natural Resources

A windy day, a nearby refuge; for snow goose hunters, that's a prescription for success. Otherwise, hunting prospects are sporadic during the late winter/spring season as the overpopulated waterfowl wing their way north to Hudson Bay nesting grounds.

Southwest Iowa has seen just a trickle so far; compared to the clouds of snow geese pushing through the Rain Water Basin of Nebraska. Up to *three million*, though, clog Nebraska refuges and fields; south of Grand Island and Kearney. Only about 60,000 were reported in the Riverton Wildlife Area early this week. Most of the rest of Iowa has been 'snow free' when it comes to spotting the targeted geese.

Still, there has been *some* good hunting. "Decoy hunting has been pretty tough, but pass shooting has been a little better," notes John Ross. Hunting in Fremont County, just outside the Riverton refuge, Ross and a hunting partner have taken several geese apiece each of the last few days. "We try to pattern them, so we know where to set up," says Ross. "Wind direction will influence which way they go. They get up into the wind." On their best day--a really windy afternoon--they shot 15 that were heading out to feed.

The special spring hunt is needed to save the bird from itself. "Snow goose populations grew dramatically during the 1990s and early in this century," points out Guy Zenner, Iowa Department of Natural Resources waterfowl biologist. "The season is designed to reduce their numbers so they have less of an impact on their habitat." Huge clouds of northbound snow geese follow the snow line north to Arctic tundras being destroyed because of their huge numbers. Colonies of up to a half million snow geese over-browse their home areas; then grub up the roots in a desperate search for nutrition; ripping up miles of vegetation. The impact is felt on other species, as well.

Because of the sheer numbers, the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service extends shooting with a 'conservation order,' which also relaxes harvest regulations. The daily bag limit of 20 might seem generous, until you see and hear wave after wave of snow geese pushing across the sky. Electronic calling is allowed, as is removal of shot-restricting magazine plugs in shotguns. A 2005 federal waterfowl stamp is not required under the special conservation order.

In past years, spring and fall snow goose hunters benefited from expansive decoy spreads. Hundreds, sometimes a thousand or more, would be plugged into picked grain fields to lure the high flying snows down to feed. Most of the geese coming through now, though, are decoy-wary adults that are not easily fooled. A poor hatch in 2004 and, perhaps, several years of harvesting younger birds means fewer of them this time around. "It's mostly adult birds we are seeing," says Ross. "The afternoon we took 15, all were adults except for one or two. Overall, I'd say about 75 percent of the snow geese we are harvesting are mature birds."

And with reduction of the population as the bottom line, there have been some encouraging signs. “This special season seems to be working,” assesses Zenner. “We do annual counts and they suggest that snow goose numbers are declining now. If we continue on this course, we can get this population to a level that’s more in balance with their habitat.” Still, even optimistic estimates say it would be *decades* before the fragile ecosystem can recover when—or if—the snow goose glut wanes.

Hunting pressure on snows has been relatively light this year. Recently, Ross says hunter numbers dipped, though they were about normal earlier. “If we could report 100,000 to 150,000 geese on area counts, there would be more hunters here.” Up to now, though, those snow goose numbers have steered clear of much of their Iowa flyway.

###

BOAT REGISTRATIONS DUE BY APRIL 30

DES MOINES – Boat and personal watercraft owners are required to renew the registration of their vessels by April 30. Registration fees vary depending on the size of the vessel and are paid to the county recorder in the county where the owner resides. Failure to display current registration is a simple misdemeanor.

Iowa’s recreational boating activities continue to grow each year. Registration fees are used to support Iowa’s boating enforcement and safety program.

###

SONGBIRD FEAST

AMES - Songbird lovers can supercharge their songbird feeding program by planting beautiful trees and shrubs to provide food and year around shelter for their feathered friends.

"Urban and rural yards can provide important habitat for many species of songbirds, and greatly strengthen your bird feeding program," said Stan Tate, forester with the Iowa Department of Natural Resources, in Wapello.

“Now is the time to order songbird packets to plant in your yard next spring. It will make the birds happy and your yard more beautiful,” said Tate. For only \$20 and a few hours work, “you can plant trees and shrubs that will help feed and shelter your songbirds for your entire lifetime. Plant only once, but enjoy for many years.”

The songbird packet is grown by the DNR forestry bureau and contains 16 favorite shrubs and 4 trees proven to attract songbirds year around. These are all grown from seed collected in Iowa.

The packet contains two bur oak trees, two white pine trees, four wild plum bushes, four chokecherry bushes, four gray dogwood bushes, and four serviceberry bushes. This planting can be easily fit into a small lot or backyard in town and will help beautify the neighborhood.

“Songbird packets make great gifts for friends and relatives,” Tate said. The State Forest Nursery provides gift certificates for those receiving the gift this spring. The packet will arrive between now and the end of May along with planting instructions.

To order, call 1-800-865-2477 and ask for the Songbird Packet. Checks, VISA or Master Card are accepted. Shipping is free. For more information, log on to www.iowadnr.com/forestry.

###